

The market for our food is right here with us:

A Case Study from Kenya on Social Audits for School Feeding

By Leah Njeri and Boaz Munga

Introduction

In local Kenyan communities, a school meal is often the main meal a child may have throughout the day. Thus, school feeding programmes play an essential role in keeping children from poorer communities in school. While school feeding programmes are a necessity, their success is sometimes hindered by a lack of transparency, or by local community members and parents not having a complete understanding of the school feeding procurement process.

SNV is an international non-profit development organization. Through our expertise in Agriculture, Renewable Energy and WASH, we use local solutions to tackle global challenges.

The Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is a 5-year programme funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented by SNV USA in Ghana, Kenya and Mali. In Kenya, PG-HGSF is implemented in 15 districts with the goal of involving 10,000 smallholder farmers in local school feeding programmes, including at least 30% women.

This document is the first in a series of PG-HGSF learning cases that capture lessons from pilot interventions linking smallholder farmers to school feeding programmes. To find out more about PG-HGSF, contact Katherine Casey, Learning Manager, at kcasey@snvworld.org or visit www.snvworld.org/en/procurement-for-hgsf



The Kenyan government introduced the Home Grown School Meals (HGSM) programme in 2009.¹ The programme has the dual objectives of improving children's participation in education while simultaneously supporting local agricultural production by procuring foodstuff from local smallholder farmers.

Smallholder farmers, who are often parents of children that participate in school feeding programmes, face a number of challenges that hinder them from taking advantage of the HGSM market.² They lack adequate information about tenders and how the market functions. Furthermore, school feeding programmes in Kenya typically have weak accountability and transparency systems, lack citizen engagement, and do not have inclusive decision-making processes. The communities' roles in many school feeding programmes are limited to in-kind contributions (such as supplying firewood and water) and paying school cooks.³ Finally, because

communities and stakeholders have very little information about school feeding programmes, they are not able to hold school managers accountable, which can undermine the effectiveness of the programmes.

In order to create more opportunities for smallholder farmers to participate in school feeding programmes, the Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding (PG-HGSF) project is empowering communities to take a stronger role in their local school meals programmes. One such approach is the social audit, a participatory mechanism designed to increase accountability by and for the programmes' stakeholders.

This case study highlights the use of social audits in the county of Elgeyo Marakwet. The county is one of the six counties where SNV piloted the social audit mechanism.⁴ In Elgeyo Marakwet, SNV not only introduced and established social audits, but stakeholders in the community also started to institute this practice. This case details the social audit process, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations from the audits in Elgeyo Marakwet.

HGSM Social Audits in Kenya

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) describes a social audit as, "a way of measuring, understanding, reporting, and ultimately improving an organization's social and ethical performance. [It] helps to narrow gaps between vision/goal and reality, between efficiency and effectiveness." Social audits are used for a multitude of purposes and, thus, are created and carried out in many different ways. In Kenya, SNV designs school feeding social audits as a forum for stakeholders—government officials, education officials, teachers,

- 1 Prior to 2009, school feeding was funded by the World Food Program (WFP). In 2013, the HGSM programme provided school meals to about 0.75 million children in about 1,800 schools in 66 semi-arid districts; WFP, <http://www.wfp.org/countries/kenya/overview> (accessed on June 2, 2014).
- 2 SNV (2011), Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding. Project Proposal submitted to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. SNV.
- 3 SNV (2012), *Challenges and Opportunities: Smallholders and School Feeding—Initial Baseline Report*. PG-HGSF Project Learning Series No. 1; and SNV (2011), Procurement Governance for Home Grown School Feeding: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- 4 The other Counties were: Baringo, Kilifi, Kitui, Laikipia and Narok.



and the community members—to meet and discuss all issues around the HGSM programme. By establishing channels for communication between communities and officials, the goal for the audits is to increase the transparency of the HGSM programme.

In Kenya, SNV's social audits consist of a series of participatory events at the county and community level, including: mobilisation of stakeholders, presentation of data, a community score card exercise, community interface meetings, and the development of an action plan.

In order to mobilise stakeholders, SNV meets with school feeding representatives at the county and school levels to discuss where and how the social audit events will take place, the goals of the audit, and the role each representative will play during the events. To prepare the head teachers to share data about the meals programme at their schools with the community in an accurate and transparent way, SNV equips them with an input data tracking tool to capture key statistics, including: the number of children receiving meals at their schools and how much funding the school receives from the government for school feeding. The audit events kick-off with a presentation of this data. All attendees also receive a basic overview of the HGSM programme, including the procurement guidelines and the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder.

The audits are anchored by a community score card exercise developed by SNV.⁵ As part of this exercise, stakeholders are split into two groups to assess HGSM services. One group consists of teachers and School Meals Programme Committee members and the other group consists of parents and representatives from farmer organizations and the community. Both groups assess HGSM services in three areas: the procurement of food, the management of funds, and the management of the food upon arrival at the schools. To guide the assessment, SNV developed score cards with multiple indicators that allowed the stakeholders to rank services on a scale of one to five, with one being poor and five being excellent. During the score card exercise, the two groups of stakeholders identify their scores separately before coming together to share how they scored each service.

After both groups complete their score cards, they are reunited for a community interface meeting and the different scores from each group are discussed openly. The meeting enables all stakeholders to express their feelings and experiences with the school meals program, and serves as a forum for providing encouragement, voicing dissatisfaction, and providing critical feedback and suggestions. Through discussion and debate, the stakeholders arrive at a consensus on the overall score for the HGSM services in their community.

Structure of School Feeding Programmes in Kenya

There are numerous public sector stakeholders involved in implementing the HGSM programme. At the national level, the HGSM Programme is managed by the School Health, Nutrition and Meals Unit at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). MOEST disburses funds directly to schools. Each primary school has a School Meals Programme Committee (SMPC) in charge of overseeing food procurement and delivery to schools in accordance with the guidelines given. The SMPC is also responsible for sharing the proposed budgets with parents. The head teacher is responsible for overall management and implementation of the HGSM programme at the school level. He/she is also responsible for accounting of HGSM funds received, preparing procurement plans in consultation with the committee, and ensuring proper recordkeeping and reporting to the sub-county education officer on a monthly basis—using templates provided by the Ministry of Education. Public stakeholders, including the County Director of Education and the Sub County Education Officer, are responsible for programme coordination, training, and capacity building in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

⁵ SNV developed the social audit approach applied in Kenya in collaboration with the National Taxpayers Association (NTA). The score card was developed by SNV in collaboration with the National Taxpayers Association and pre-tested in three communities.





The social audit events were mainly held outdoors so as not to disrupt the school day. On average, 30 people participated from each of the nine schools.

The interface meeting concludes with the development of an action plan to improve HGSM services based on the outcome of the score card exercise and the consensus that the community reached during the meeting. The action plan contains concrete next steps for improving the HGSM services, outlines how the community will be monitoring the services in the year ahead, and specifies strategies for refining HGSM service delivery. The action plan is tailored to the needs of each community, documents their priorities for the HGSM program, and provides a benchmark for measuring progress.

Social Audits in Elgeyo Marakwet

SNV initiated social audits in Elgeyo Marakwet⁶ in 2013, starting with stakeholder mobilization meetings at the county level. The County Director of Education⁷ office identified nine schools⁸ in the county to participate in the first round of social audits. SNV then organised a meeting with the head teachers and school feeding officers of all nine schools to provide an overview of the social audit events and their involvement. During the meeting, the teachers identified parents to invite to the audit events in their communities. The teachers paid particular attention to inviting parents with different occupations, parents with children in different grade levels, and parents who had both boys and girls in school. SNV also introduced the teachers to the input data tracking tool, which they were asked to complete in preparation for the presentation of data at the audits. Finally, SNV and the head teachers set dates for social audit events in nine communities from May–June 2013.

Each audit commenced with a presentation of the HGSM programme, including a review of the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including: community members, the School Meals Programme Committee, head teachers, and ministry representatives at both the Sub County and national levels. The presentation included information on the procurement process for HGSM and the requirement for schools to obtain foodstuff from smallholder farmers.

Following the overview of the HGSM program, the community's head teacher presented the data collected via the input data tracking tool, including: the number of children receiving meals at their schools; how much funding the school receives from the government; the number of school days covered by the meals program; quantity of food purchased; and at what prices foodstuff is supplied.

⁶ The social audit events in Elgeyo Marakwet Country were conducted in collaboration with Eldosirikwa Consultants.

⁷ The social audit events in Elgeyo Marakwet were conducted in close partnership with Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). MOEST provided inputs, mobilised stakeholders, and provided technical support during the audit events.

⁸ Chegilet, Kabore, Kiptoro, Chemurgui, Emsea, Muskut, Chugor, Sambalat, Toroko primary schools.



SNV and the Ministry of Education Sub County-level representatives responsible for the programme introduced the community score card exercise and presented the three areas to be assessed. As noted above, participants in each community split into two groups to complete the score cards. Each group independently evaluated the HGSM programme based on the procurement of food, the management of funds, and how food was managed upon arrival at the schools.

After reflecting on the scores they assigned as groups, both sides convened for the community interface meeting to discuss their results and come to a consensus on a score for HGSM services to the community as a whole. Participants shared the rationale for their scores and compared their experiences with that of other stakeholders.

Across the nine communities included in the 2013 audits, the interface meetings revealed some common strengths of the HGSM programme. Multiple communities, for example, noted the role that community members are already playing in school feeding programmes through in-kind contributions. Communities and schools alike noted that a lack of firewood or water was rarely a problem at the schools, even though fuel is not covered by the HGSM funding and safe drinking water is not always readily available in the community. Parents seated with teachers during the interface discussion reported to SNV that the dialogue motivated them to expand their contributions to the school beyond in-kind contributions, in part because their trust for the teachers improved during the social audit events.

The interface meeting also revealed some common weaknesses in HGSM services, such as the lack of a separate bank account for government school feeding funding disbursements at the school level, which is required under the HGSM procurement guidelines. Most schools in Elgeyo Marakwet have just one bank account for all government funds, including the disbursements for textbooks and salaries. Since the school feeding payment schedule is often delayed, teachers do not necessarily know when a particular deposit is made for school feeding programmes versus for other purposes. Thus, having a separate account removes the potential for confusion and increases the transparency of HGSM payments. Another common weakness is the lack of community awareness of their role in electing members of the School Meals Programme Committee. The community has the power to elect three people to the committee, including the chairperson and two parents. Attendees noted that the community has not been proactive about electing the right people to participate in the committee because they did not understand its purpose, or its role.

One of the primary schools had not procured food during the term—despite having sufficient money in their bank account—because the head teacher was hospitalised. Since none of the other staff members had knowledge of procurement, the school did not buy food for school meals for an entire term. In this instance, the community learned that the county school feeding officer can support procurement in the event that the head teacher is unable to fulfil his/her role. While this weakness emerged in only one community, it provided country representatives with valuable insight into capacity gaps at the school level.

After the interface meeting, participants in each community collaborated on the development of an action plan to outline concrete recommendations for improving HGSM services. The communities in Elgeyo Marakwet used the action plan as a platform for outlining strategies to improve service delivery at the county level, and for giving input to county and ministry representatives. For example, they called for county governments to work closely with the national government to improve issues that currently undermine the programme, such as delayed timelines for releasing funding for school feeding as well as inadequacy of funds. The community also called

"We thought social audit was about scrutinizing the mistakes that the school is making. We are happy to have a forum where we can engage with the parents so that they know the challenges we are facing in feeding their children and how we can work with them."

—SMPC member in Elgeyo Marakwet



for the Ministry of Agriculture to start providing the School Meals Programme Committee with a list of all local registered farmer business groups so that schools can purchase food from them. This practical step would enable the committee to source from local smallholder farmers with greater ease.

The action plans also outlined clear next steps at a county, school, and community level. For example, the action plans developed at the county level included setting up a forum to provide continuity in the discussion of school feeding services. The forum is also designed to monitor the county's HGSM programmes. At the school level, the action plans called for improving the kitchens, food storage, and water facilities at the schools. Head teachers were given the responsibility to mobilise the local communities for future audits. The action plans also outlined roles for the community in building school gardens and initiating income-generating activities to provide additional in-kind support to the HGSM programmes. In one community, the action plan called for an observer to be present when the September 2014 tenders were opened, and to also be present during the evaluation of the tenders. Finally, the action plans tasked the communities with forming committees to support and monitor the implementation of the action plans and prepare for the next audit.

Results of the Social Audit Sessions

Following the social audit events in Elgeyo Marakwet, the nine participating communities reported the following outcomes:



Head teachers noted that community participation in the schools' affairs improved. This can be attributed to a better understanding of HGSM objectives and processes, which has enhanced the community's monitoring role. The parents have a better sense of their stake in the HGSM programme and all stakeholders have a better understanding of the beneficial role of social audits.



Some schools adopted joint procurement processes to enable bulk purchases, which cuts costs. Chegilet primary school and its five neighbouring schools jointly bought food in bulk from two farmer organisations. This arrangement was reportedly cheaper than a previous agreement of sourcing food in smaller units from local traders.



Trust and harmony between parents and schools increased. There is a better sense of ownership of HGSM programmes by parents. As a result, parents contribute more to the programme. For example, in Kabore Primary School, parents helped improve the school's kitchen. This involvement aligns with government aspirations to enhance the participation of local communities in supporting education programmes.⁹



Schools reported getting more bids from smallholder farmer organisations to supply products for school meals. Kabore primary school had a women's group register after the social audit sessions and they won a tender to supply 13 (90Kg each) bags of beans, worth \$1,000.¹⁰



Community members reported feeling empowered and respected by the government during the social audit events. They reported that the information presented from the input data tracking tool empowered them with the information necessary to participate fully in the dialogue HGSM.

"You mean the market for our food is right here with us? What a blessing."

—A parent and farmer from Chegilet Primary School in Elgeyo

"This process will lead to greater accountability among head teachers and the home grown school meals committees as there are more people who have eyes on what is happening at school."

—Francisca, School Feeding officer, Keiyo North Sub-County.

⁹ Ministry of Education: Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (2005–2010)

¹⁰ The group supplied thirteen 90 kilogram bags of beans at Kenyan Shillings 7,020 (just over USD 80) per bag.



One community was even asked to participate in a committee on procurement that was part of a county's cash transfer programme.



The county government is now more interested in the HGSM programme. Discussions about the role of the county government in the HGSM programme are ongoing. This is a good sign since the county governments are responsible for early childhood development and education.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The nine social audits in Elgeyo Marakwet revealed the following lessons for SNV organisers and for school feeding stakeholders in Kenya and beyond:

- (a) ***The political environment and governance structures have great influence on social audit processes.*** Following the adoption of a new constitution in 2010, Kenya initiated a government restructuring that devolved certain Ministry of Education duties, including the administration of school feeding programmes, to the county level. As a result, the commitment of county-level representatives—from providing input during the initial stakeholder meetings to responding to community recommendations via the action plans—was limited. County governments, in other words, were still in the process of structuring their roles with respect to the HGSM programmes.
- (b) ***Creating a gender balance during social audit events is valuable.*** Discussions during the social audit sessions highlighted the contributions of women, who often provide the in-kind contributions of firewood and water. These inputs were cited as one of the key strengths of the HGSM programme in multiple communities. A good balance between men and women in all social audits events ensured that the perspectives and experience of women in the community were given equal attention. Likewise, the contributions of male participants were also valued, as they tended to raise issues related to funds management and leadership for the community to consider.
- (c) ***County governments can act as effective advocacy agents for school feeding programmes with the national government.*** Social audits can help provide evidence on how school feeding programmes are improving educational indicators nationally. The audits also reveal the perennial challenges of inadequate funding, funding delays, and poor communication among HGSM programme stakeholders. This information can be utilised by the county government to advocate for greater national support and attention to HGSM programmes in their county.

The audits also revealed a number of recommendations for maximizing the efficiency and impact of social audits. This learning can improve SNV's practice of using social audits in Kenya, and also inform the efforts of communities and NGOs embarking on social audits in other contexts as well.

- (a) ***Organisers need to come up with effective strategies for engaging a large number of participants.*** The social audit events in Elgeyo Marakwet attracted more participants than were initially selected by head teachers and SNV. Between the community score card exercise and the interface meetings, the participatory nature of the sessions provided all participants with ample opportunities to share their perspectives directly with school and county representatives in a constructive environment. The high level of interest and participation was beneficial to the discussions and will provide additional support for the activities outlined in action plans. However, SNV and other implementing partners need to identify effective strategies for engaging larger numbers of participants while still ensuring that audit events stay on schedule and on topic.
- (b) ***Social audit tools need support to be adopted by communities.*** In order for the communities in Elgeyo Marakwet to continue organizing social audits, as indicated in their action plans, they will need additional training to conduct these audits and make effective use of the social audit tools, like the input data tracking tool.

(continued)



- (c) **Organisers need to consider how to increase the participation of local farmers in the social audits activities.** While most of the stakeholders present for the social audit events hailed from the given community, the participation of smallholder farmers or farmer organisations was limited. This situation can be attributed to the structure of the HGSM programmes, which operate in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya. Farmers, the potential suppliers of food for HGSM, tend to come from agriculturally-rich areas of the country. Organisers need to identify how to strengthen the participation of farmers to ensure that their voices are heard.
- (d) **To help reduce errors and delays from obtaining data from schools, school feeding officers should be tasked with collecting data on a regular basis.** As head teachers worked with SNV to complete the input data tracking tool prior to the launch of the social audit, it became clear that recordkeeping can be strengthened at the school level to improve efficiency and transparency throughout the year. To facilitate this process, school feeding officers at the county level should standardise the collection of data from schools for the input tracking tool on a monthly basis, including information on suppliers.



Conclusions

The social audit events for nine schools in Elgeyo Marakwet County provided a forum for community and government representatives to discuss how the HGSM programme is being implemented at the school level. The sessions generated greater awareness of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in the programme and revealed opportunities for greater community involvement—from supplying in-kind contributions to monitoring the programme's implementation. By initiating a dialogue between government officials, teachers, and members of the community, the social audit sessions strengthened these relationships and laid the foundation for increased transparency and programmatic accountability.